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SUBJECT: STRONG NEGATIVE GOB REACTION TO KOSOVO'S INDEPENDENCE
DECLARATION

REF: Minsk 116 (and previous)

Summary and Comment

1. (SBU) Aleksandr Lukashenko and the Belarusian MFA have issued strong statements against Kosovo's February 17 declaration of independence, with Lukashenko even chastising Russia for not taking steps sooner on Serbia's behalf. Belarus' negative reaction to Kosovo's independence declaration was expected (reftel), but Lukashenko's criticism of Russia was a bit of a surprise. End summary and comment.

LUKASHENKO CRITICAL OF BOTH RUSSIA AND WEST ON KOSOVO

2. (U) In a February 18 interview with the Russia's RIA Novosti news agency which was transcribed in Minsk's "Sovietskaya Belorussiya" February 19, Aleksandr Lukashenko offered his strong objections to Kosovo's independence and a critique of Russia's intervention on the question. Speaking "frankly" Lukashenko complained that neither Russia nor Belarus can influence the situation in Kosovo now. Lukashenko accused Russia of not "coming to the defense of Yugoslavia" in time. Lukashenko said that the division of Yugoslavia should not have been tolerated and that Russia and Belarus had had "all the means necessary" to oppose NATO action in Yugoslavia, "to oppose aggression against our (Slavic) brothers." Lukashenko lamented that it was too late to "sing songs," the process of the division of Yugoslavia had begun long ago. He expressed regret over loss of control in the Balkan region, which led to Kosovo's independence declaration and the "continuation of the division" of Yugoslavia.

3. (U) Lukashenko vehemently criticized what he called a European "double standard" toward Kosovo. "Even in our European home," according to Lukashenko, Europe was acting "immaturely, not even speaking about the Americans." Lukashenko maintained the USG and the EU had criticized Belarus and Russia over "mistaken approaches to Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria" and he characterized the stance Russia and Belarus shared on Kosovo as "absolutely fair."

4. (U) Following Lukashenko's remarks, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus released a statement on Kosovo February 19. The statement is available on the MFA's web site (www.mfa.gov.by) and is repeated below in full.

BEGIN TEXT

Statement by the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Belarus On the Unilateral Proclamation of Independence by the Kosovo Temporary Authorities of Self-Government

The Republic of Belarus believes that the settlement of Kosovo and Metohia's status should progress under international law, based on UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (of 1999) which is a fundamental document for the Kosovo settlement certifying the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Serbia, and based on the key provisions of the UN Charter and Helsinki Final Act, with the essential role of the UN Security Council bearing a predominant responsibility for safeguarding international peace and security.

The Republic of Belarus is convinced that the only way to address tensions and achieve stability in the region is political settlement which comes back down to a negotiation between Belgrade and Pristina, with possible involvement of international intermediaries.

Belarus hopes that a mutually acceptable settlement of Kosovo and Metohia's status could be achieved in line with the conventional standards and principles of international law.

END TEXT

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